

CLAIMS

We claim:

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1. A user assistance system for providing user assistance in connection with procedures associated with the operation of a computer program running on a computer system, each of said procedures comprising an interrelated series of steps, with one of the steps being a currently-selected step, said user assistance system comprising:

a client area displaying information pertaining to the currently-selected step; and

a navigator bar adjacent to said work area, said navigator bar displaying a visual representation of said interrelated series of steps associated with said currently-selected step.

2. The user assistance system of claim 1, wherein said navigator bar is dividable into segments, with each segment corresponding to one of said steps of said interrelated series of steps.

3. The user assistance system of claim 2, wherein said visual representation of said interrelated series of steps displayed by said navigator bar includes a display of future steps not yet performed by said computer program.

4. The user assistance program of claim 3, wherein said future steps comprise the most likely steps to be traversed for the procedure associated with the interrelated series of steps being displayed.

A 5. The user assistance system of claim 4, wherein said visual representation of said interrelated series of steps displayed by said navigator bar further includes:

past steps already performed by said computer program; and
the currently-selected step.

6. The user assistance system of claim 5, wherein said segments include active segments and inactive segments, and wherein selection of an active segment changes the currently-selected step to the step corresponding to said selected active segment.

7. The user assistance system of claim 6, wherein said navigator bar displays said segments in a serial manner, and wherein said navigator bar can be scrolled to allow viewing of segments preceding or following said segment corresponding to said currently-selected step.

8. The user assistance system of claim 7, wherein the action of scrolling said navigator bar does not change the information being displayed in said client area.

9. The user assistance system of claim 8, wherein said information displayed in said client area comprises a selectable list of alternative choices for subsequent steps to be taken by said computer program.

10. The user assistance system of claim 9, wherein selection of one of said alternative choices causes said display of future steps not yet performed by said computer program to change to a display of said future steps associated with said selected alternative choice.

11. A method for providing user assistance in connection with procedures associated with the operation of a computer program running on a computer system, each of said procedures comprising an interrelated series of steps, with one of the steps being a currently-selected step, said method comprising the steps of:

generating a client area in which information pertaining to the currently-selected step is displayed; and

generating a navigator bar adjacent to said work area, said navigator bar displaying a visual representation of said interrelated series of steps associated with said currently-selected step.

12. The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of dividing said navigator bar into segments, with each segment corresponding to one of said steps of said interrelated series of steps.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein said visual representation of said interrelated series of steps displayed by said navigator bar includes a display of future steps not yet performed by said computer program.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein said future steps comprise the most likely steps to be traversed for the procedure associated with the interrelated series of steps being displayed.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein said visual representation of said interrelated series of steps displayed by said navigator bar further includes:

past steps already performed by said computer program; and
the currently-selected step.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein said segments include active segments and inactive segments, and wherein selection of an active segment changes the currently-selected step to the step corresponding to said selected active segment.

17. The method of claim 16, further comprising the steps of:
displaying said segments on said navigator bar in a serial manner; and
providing means for scrolling said navigator bar, wherein said navigator bar can be
scrolled to allow viewing of segments preceding or following said segment corresponding
to said currently-selected step.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein the action of scrolling said navigator bar does
not change the information being displayed in said client area.

19. The method of claim 18, further comprising the step of displaying in said client
area a selectable list of alternative choices for subsequent steps to be taken by said
computer program.

20. The method of claim 19, further comprising the step of changing the display
of future steps not yet performed by said computer program to a display of said future
steps associated with a selected alternative choice, when one of said alternative choices is
selected.